

St George Historical Society Bulletin

October - December , 2015



A Look Into the Future: The eagerly-sought upgrade of Arncliffe railway station is set to get under way.

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Meetings are held on the third Saturday, of each month, commencing at 2pm.

**Meetings are held at Sans Souci Library, cnr of Russell Av and Clareville Av Sans Souci
(no meetings December and January)**

**Here are our meeting dates for the remainder of 2015
17th October, 21st November.**

**Next Meeting: 17th October, 2015
at Sans Souci Library**

Contributions to this bulletin, articles, photographs, news, notes, diary dates, reviews etc., are always welcome - please contact the editor,
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**The St George Historical Society web site may be accessed
at**


<http://stgeorgehistsoc.org.au>


**The St George Historical Society Facebook page may be
seen at**

St George Historical Society Inc





News & Notes

 **"Collectibles Fair" at Lydham Hall. - A resounding success - congratulations to the organisers and helpers - the weather tried hard to spoil the day but did not succeed. Sales on the tables were excellent and the afternoon teas were a highlight.**

 **St.George Historical Society Raffle Winner of a box of Adora handmade chocolates Ticket Number B35: Mary Armstrong. Congratulations Mary! Enjoy!**

 **The Rathbone Local History Prize, announced on September 5th was won by St George Historical Society member, Dr Garry Darby - see photograph below**

 **About Trove Again:** A shortfall in funds has not stopped the progress of digitising the St George Call on Trove. However this next batch will now cover the years 1904 to 1912. All is proceeding well and with the great support from this Society the next batch will be online prior to Christmas 2105. The access to the St George Call on our home computers has been a great boon to research and as the project rolls on there will be more and more of this great material and information available not only to us but to scholars, students and researchers across Australia -no, across the world. There have been a number of suggestions to digitise "The Propellor", another great newspaper that served our St George community. Any benefactors out there who would like to contribute to the project ?

 **Our September meeting held on the 5th was a jolly affair - 60 people were present and tested the capacity of the Sans Souci Library. Guest speaker, Dr Garry Darby spoke on the "Doll's Point Digger" and conducted a 'forum' discussion. Helen Darby supervised afternoon tea with the help of Yvonne Stephens, Ellen Endicott and Lorraine Brown - "well done". We had many visitors and several invited guests.**

 **New Members are needed for the St George Historical Society. It has been suggested that ALL members make a special effort and turn up for the OCTOBER meeting and**

**BRING A FRIEND WITH THEM ! We should then have about 60 people at the meeting.
Will you help your Society ?**

🕒 **Welcome to new members who have joined our Society since the last newsletter**

**Yvonne and Tammy Hawkins of Sans Souci
Beryl Hutchinson of Ramsgate Beach
Barry Johnson of Sans Souci**

The Arncliffe History Walk 26.7.2015



President Bernard Sharah leads an enthusiastic group on the Arncliffe history walk.

The editors of *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture*, Philip Goad and Julie Willis, believe there is a vacuum in the written history of Australian architecture that needs to be addressed by a publication devised as an encyclopedia. In the introductory chapter, "Rationale and Structure," they contend that "[t]here are very few comprehensive overviews of Australian architecture." They also note that *The Encyclopedia of Australian Architecture* "is not a technical handbook ... nor is it a dictionary of architecture," and that it is "not an architectural history," but that it may serve all those purposes.



Guest Speakers Coming Up



OCTOBER Meeting. Saturday 17th October at 2pm. Rae McLintock from Sydney Living Museums, will be giving a 45 minute talk on the properties owned by Sydney Living Museums. These include Elizabeth Bay House, Hyde Park Barracks, The Museum of Sydney and Rose Seidler House at Wahroonga amongst others. This should be a very enlightening and entertaining talk. Please come along and bring a friend (or two)

NOVEMBER 21st: Gillian Lewis, Australian Maritime Museum : " HMAS Sydney and the Kormoran"

Sydney Living Museums cares for a group of 12 of the most important historic houses, gardens and museums in NSW on behalf of the people of NSW.

Our purpose is to enrich and revitalise people's lives with Sydney's living history, and to hand the precious places in our care and their collections on to future generations to enjoy.

We bring our museums to life through a dynamic and diverse program of exhibitions, research and events such as walks, talks and tours so that our visitors can experience Sydney's past as if they had lived it themselves.

We were established in 1980 as the Historic Houses Trust of NSW to manage, maintain and interpret buildings and places of historic importance for the education and enjoyment of the public. In 2013 we launched our new identity as Sydney Living Museums to refresh and unify our diverse range of properties and highlight our role and relevance for current and future generations.

We are part of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage within the NSW Department of Planning and Environment.

Please come along to our meetings and enjoy the history presented by our expert speakers. All visitors welcome

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Aboriginal warrior Pemulwuy resists Sydney colonists

In 1790, Aboriginal warrior Pemulwuy began to resist the incursion of white settlers onto his people's traditional lands. He had been born near what was later named Botany Bay, on the northern side of the Georges River, New South Wales. Despite being seriously wounded in 1797, he eluded capture until 1802 when he was shot dead. It is believed that Pemulwuy's head was cut off and sent to England.



Popular Society members Bev and Fred Scott dined at "The Grounds" Alexandria recently - looks like they are trying to eat their way through a 'history of food' !!!



UNCLE CHARLIE'S CHOOK FARM

Beryl Hutchinson*

This is the story of The Bexley Gully & the very strange buildings surrounded by thick bush that were thought to be some secret relating to World War 11, as no one seemed to have seen them until the first aerial photos of part of the Bardwell valley near Bexley Road were seen.

However I knew that they had been there from 1927 to 1947c & my family visited them very often.

On my first visit to the St. George Historical Society at Sans Souci in July, I picked up its quarterly magazine to be very surprised to find an article written by Fred Scott about my UNCLE CHARLIE'S POULTRY FARM. I immediately contacted my cousin Vilma & spent most of the next day going through my family history records & asking her about growing up with more chooks than people.

CHARLES FLETCHER WAS BORN AT Manchester Lan. England on 20th.Sept.1902 & He & his two sisters. Hilda & Doris; Brother James Croom & their parents Hugo & Hannah nee Greenhalgh Fletcher arrived in Sydney in Nov. 1912. When he was in his early 20s Charles became engaged to Annie Ellen Yatman aka Nellie who was born in

London. They were both hard workers with little money but were able to buy 7 acres of ground in ORPINGTON ST.BEXLY NORTH

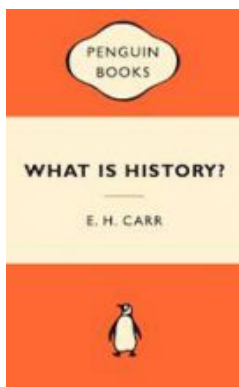
There were many poultry farms in the area including one owned by his brother law, Thomas, aka, Arthur Hutchinson, in Alston St Bexley, who helped the young couple get started. Charlie & Nellie married & moved into the wood & fibro house he had built for them & together they built all the tin sheds & pens which covered all of the 7 acres except a patch which ran down towards Bexley Road & was always planted with Lucerne for feed for the hens. This was the reason why the buildings couldn't be seen from the road which was only a dirt track & had little traffic. Orpington St off Cannonberry Grove was a little dirt & gravel cul de sac which cut away sharply down the gully so little could be seen of the buildings. The Farm could not be seen from the gully as the bottom part was council owned & covered with trees.

Their daughter, Vilma, was born in 1929 & Ron, their son in 1933. Grandma Fletcher died in 1936 so Grandpa went to live with uncle Charlie & worked with him & lived in a tiny little hut we called pop's humpy until he died in 1953. He was 80 years old. Uncle Charlie was in essential services providing hundreds of eggs & chickens ready every week for the war effort to feed the troops.

Everyone in the family worked hard & long hours. After the war had finished, what with the acute shortage of housing, & the need for building schools & roads & have better planning in Sydney the NSW Government introduced Greenbelt places like the Bardwell Park Valley & so they reclaimed uncle Charlie's 7 acres, basically leaving him with almost no income as the compensation was very poor, so he built four tennis courts with lights to give him a regular income. Two beside his house & two on blocks he owned across the road in Orpington St.

SO UNCLE CHARLIE'S LAND BECAME KNOWN AS THE BARDWELL VALLEY RESERVE.

- Beryl Hutchinson is the newest member of the StGHS (ed) - Beryl is the person to contact about forthcoming bus trips and tours (9529 5503) - arranged in conjunction with Ramsgate Seniors Club.3



E. H. Carr's *What Is History?* is the classic introduction to the theory of history. Exploding the Victorian myth of history as a simple record of fact, Carr draws on sources from Nietzsche to Herodotus to argue for a more subtle definition of history as 'an unending dialogue between the present and the past'. Lively, scholarly and challenging, this book is essential reading for anyone interested in the meaning of history and its role in society.



Winner: Rockdale mayor Shane O'Brien with prize winner Garry Darby.

Picture: Sam Venn

St George Historical Society member, Dr Garry Darby receiving the 2015 Rathbone Local History Prize for 2015 from Mayor Shane O'Brien



SOME ARCHITECTURAL FIRSTS FOR ST. GEORGE MUNICIPALITY, GREATER SYDNEY AND BEYOND

Avant-garde architecture or building techniques and materials are probably not generally associated with the St. George Municipality. One could be forgiven for thinking such marvels pertain to the likes of the Eastern Suburbs or Northern Suburbs vis a vis respectively Elizabeth Bay House with its magnificent cantilevered staircase and superb oval saloon dome or Rose Seidler House with its at the time revolutionary futuristic styling.

But of what architectural firsts or feats of innovation or experimentation can our municipality boast? Many a resident might think this 'at face value' to be a fair and reasonable question. To start to redress this misconception, I would like to highlight three houses chronologically which perhaps conceal remarkable qualities in their very fabric. These houses have innovative or even unique features not just for St. George municipality but greater Sydney and beyond.

TEMPE HOUSE: 1833-1836 WOLLI CREEK

Perhaps Tempe House has latterly become the most iconic house in the St. George Municipality. This precious survivor is of national significance. Today it might serve as a delightful counter-foil for the adjacent high-rise Wolli Creek development which envelops its environs.

This house was built for Scotsman Alexander Brodie Spark who could be said to have been an 'entrepreneur' with business interests ranging from wine to wool and ever so many other

commodities. Alas, the tumultuous depression of the 1840s was to prove an ongoing financial impost on this fortunes of this entrepreneurial gentleman. The estate was named after the 'Vale of Tempe' in ancient Greece. The house was designed by the celebrated colonial architect John Verge specifically to harmonize with a garden reflecting an idyllic 'Arcadian' landscape. Incidentally, John Verge also designed other notable homes, the most famous being *Elizabeth Bay House* and *Camden Park House*.

Tempe House is noteworthy for a number of reasons, some of which are listed below:

- 1) It is the oldest house in the St. George Municipality and the earliest remaining home south of the Cooks River;
- 2) The estate still encompasses twelve acres, most unusual (perhaps unique?) for a property within such close proximity to the city;
- 3) The sandstone house was designed with unusual Neo-Classical Georgian elements such as the symmetrically designed semi-circular verandahs with Tuscan styled timber columns which front the main entrance. I understand the double curved verandahs are the earliest such example of this form of architecture in the Australian context; and
- 4) Fine colonial internal appointments, in particular one of the two fireplaces in the principal rooms which features a marble mantelpiece and decorative hearth considered by heritage architects to be the most 'elaborate' fireplace of any surviving colonial (pre 1850s) period home on mainland Australia.

DAPPETO - 1885 ARNCLIFFE

This grand two storey Victorian mansion is one of the largest houses constructed in the St. George Municipality. The house forms the core of the Macquarie Lodge nursing home complex. The home was built for Englishman Frederick John Gibbins, a self-made man who enjoyed great wealth from being an oyster merchant and trawling magnate. This individual exemplifies the classic Australian 'story' of a 'man made good through industry and initiative' as he was originally transported for theft of a handkerchief! Frederick also happened to be the Grandfather of the famous Australian authoress, Christina Stead.

The house is built of sandstock bricks and is adorned with a charming two storey verandah sporting an iron balustrade and trim to the upper floor and frieze to the lower floor. The patterned slate roof features a Captain's Walk which is accessed via a cast iron spiral staircase. The house ostensibly is very much a product of the 'High Victorian' style.

Notwithstanding the fact of this home being a somewhat typical, albeit excellent example of a Victorian mansion, there are a few architectural and material innovations which are mentioned below:

- 1) The splendid double drawing/dining room is separated by a square archway which still contains a magnificent and very solid paneled timber folding screen. Thus the space can be kept as it usually is as one very commodious room or converted quite readily into two still spacious rooms;
- 2) The rooms mentioned above feature quality woodwork. Importantly, the use of fine English timbers and exemplary craftsmanship has together with an engaged architect, enabled the seamless coordination of all interior woodwork. Thus for example, the carving of the mantelpieces matches that of the built-in furniture which was 'made to measure' specifically for this room/s.

Fortuitously, structural 'logistics' have probably ensured the intact survival of these elaborate rooms. It should be borne in mind, the fashion in Australia for 'built-in' furniture would not become the 'norm' for another eighty or more years; and

- 3) One feature embedded in the very fabric of the house would today incur the ire of the likes of Greenpeace. As a means of precluding dampness from penetrating the walls of the house, whale oil was mixed with the bricks. Perhaps this technique has worked as the un-rendered walls appear to be very sound and in excellent order.

I wonder if there are any other documented cases of buildings in Sydney or elsewhere being weatherproofed with whale oil?

WEST MALING – 1889 PENSHURST

This two storey house is considered one of the purest examples of the Queen Anne style of architecture in Australia.

The home is built of warm brick laid in English bond and features steeply pitched slate roofs, ornamental brackets, elaborate and monumental brick chimneys, stained glass windows and Tudor style battening. It is believed the architecture could have been influenced by the then fashionable British architect Norman Shaw. The house was built for Englishman Albert By the sea Weigall who was the first headmaster of Sydney Grammar School.

Although only a few years younger than Dappeto, the architecture quite radically differed to the ubiquitous Italianate cement rendered type of house being built at the time. A couple of the most significant aspects of this gracious house are noted below:

- 1) It is the second oldest known example of the Queen Anne style of architecture in Australia (predated only by the still extant 1885 Bellevue Hill home *Caerleon*); and
- 2) The roof features terracotta slates imported from Marseilles in France. It is believed this is the first use of terracotta roof tiling in Australia. Within less than twenty years, terracotta roof tiles would become manufactured in Australia and eventually come so to dominate the market as to be considered quintessentially 'Australian'. Aerial photographs of a 'sea of red roofs' in most Sydney suburbs bear testament to this fact.

Doubtlessly, other architectural firsts or building techniques are present in the St. George Municipality. If you know of any which you think might interest readers of this newsletter, please contact the editor so that the information can be disseminated more widely.

Wesley Fairhall

The Collectibles Fair



Our "Collectibles Fair " was held at Lydham Hall on Sunday 20th September and was a resounding success. The morning session was enjoyed in fine weather and our table holders all did brisk business. There was quite a number of visitors through the house and a highlight for many were the scones, jam and cream. Bev Scott and helpers were kept busy in the kitchen. Congratulations to president Bernie who did a great job organising the day. The Henke family looked after the publications table and business was brisk.